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Chairman: Mr. Galuška ..... (Czech Republic)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 109: Advancement of women (*continued*) (A/54/3, A/54/38/Rev.1, A/54/98, A/54/123-E/1999/66, A/54/124, A/54/156-E/1999/102, A/54/156/Add.1-E/1999/102/Add.1, A/54/224, A/54/225, A/54/341, A/54/342, A/54/352, A/54/405)

Agenda item 110: Implementation of the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women (*continued*) (A/54/124, A/54/264, A/54/354)

1. **Ms. Fritsche** (Liechtenstein) said that the standards set by the United Nations and by other intergovernmental organizations had been critical for the advancement of women in Liechtenstein, and her country had in turn made efforts to contribute to the work of the Organization.

2. Her delegation attached great importance to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, which had made a difference in the lives of numerous women worldwide. It was regrettable that the Convention had not yet been universally ratified and that its provisions were not yet fully implemented by all States parties. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), which had always enjoyed the support of her delegation, undoubtedly had an important role to play in that respect.

3. Her Government was aware of the difficult circumstances under which CEDAW had to operate (backlog of reports, too little meeting time, lack of support staff). But it was convinced that not all the blame lay with the system. CEDAW and the States parties must address the issues of lack of discipline and expertise. In any event, the recommendations made by CEDAW, considered as a whole, provided a very useful tool for the further promotion of women's rights.

4. Her Government welcomed the adoption by the General Assembly of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and was considering the possibility of signing it on the forthcoming Human Rights Day. The Optional Protocol was a legally sound document, would enhance the relevance of the provisions of the Convention and would serve both an educational and a practical purpose.

5. The year 2000 was a key date in relation to women's issues in three respects: goal for the universal ratification of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, goal for 50/50 gender distribution in the Secretariat, and the celebration in June 2000 of the fifth anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. Although it seemed unlikely that the first two goals would be reached, despite commendable efforts, it was still possible to attain the third objective by producing a concise and action-oriented document giving guidance for implementation of the recommendations made by the Fourth World Conference on Women.

6. **Mr. Kumalo** (South Africa) said that since the formation of the current democratic Government in 1994, South African women had occupied prominent public positions, in particular in Government, where every effort was made to ensure equal representation of men and women at all levels, both in Parliament and in the political parties. His Government was considering a wide-ranging bill designed to prevent discrimination in all areas of society.

7. Yet true gender equality had yet to be achieved in South Africa and the issues before the Committee, gender equality, poverty of rural women, sexual abuse of women and the development of rural women were goals that the Government and the entire country were attempting to meet.

8. Although the Beijing Platform for Action had presented strategies and actions to address the feminization of poverty, that problem continued to grow. It was for that reason therefore that the special session of the General Assembly in June 2000 must have participation at the highest political level.

9. The international community must accept that social ills such as absolute poverty were a collective responsibility. Member States must also embark on socio-economic development programmes and land ownership reform at the national level.

10. Government, business and the international financial institutions must collaborate to study the question of how monetary institutions and systems could redirect funds in a way that would satisfy the basic needs of all people, especially rural people. International debt relief measures must be aimed at assisting countries to provide basic social services to communities living in abject poverty.

11. The report of the Secretary-General on improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/54/123-E/1999/66) not only clearly presented the various obstacles faced by rural women but also looked at the problem of globalization and its effect on rural development. His delegation had always maintained that globalization was not merely an economic process but in fact had an impact on society as a whole, the environment and relations between men and women, and that it required, as President Mbeki had argued, deliberate interventions to increase economic

opportunities and raise the standards of living of the many in the world denied their human dignity by poverty.

12. The renaissance of Africa would truly begin when the plight of rural women was addressed. Rural women and girl children had limited access to food, health, education, paid work and land ownership, and their lives were complicated by traditional or customary practices not of their own making. He fully agreed with the report of the Secretary-General, which stated that women must be part of the decision-making structures.

13. In presenting its first country report under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), in June 1998, his delegation had specified actions taken to address the needs of rural women: a land reform programme, participation by women in rural development, agriculture, tourism, arts and crafts, and food security programmes. Furthermore, an international workshop of women in irrigation had been planned for 1999. South African women also had access to credit for participation in enterprises of various sizes. Health-care services had been upgraded, and the supply of clean drinking water and electricity had been extended to remote rural areas.

14. **Ms. Šimonović** (Croatia) noted with satisfaction that 20 years after the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the General Assembly had adopted unanimously the Optional Protocol to that Convention, which would assist CEDAW to make further progress in the protection of the rights of women.

15. The Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action constituted a framework for national and international action aimed at gender equality and the empowerment of women, action to which the United Nations had provided strong impetus. She congratulated both the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council, which had contributed to the advancement of women, the former by adopting since 1996 its agreed conclusions relating to the 12 critical areas of concern as well as resolutions on follow-up to the Platform for Action; and the latter by stressing during the high-level segment of its 1999 substantive session the need to empower women as a prerequisite for poverty eradication and job creation.

16. Violence against women remained one of the outstanding challenges to be addressed. The United Nations had recognized the need to include the gender dimension in peace and security issues. Her delegation concurred with the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women in stressing the need to develop a common conceptual framework and a methodology for research and networking on the role of women in conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

17. At a time when preparations were being made for the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century", which was to evaluate the progress made in implementing the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action, it was also important to agree on further action and initiatives for achieving gender equality.

18. Croatia itself had undertaken preparatory work for the special session. Its progress in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action included the establishment in 1996 of the Government Commission for Issues of Equality and the adoption in 1997 of the National Policy for the Promotion of Equality. Funds for the Commission had been obtained from non-governmental organizations participating in its work, together with which the Commission had organized joint meetings and forums dealing with the status of women. All the debates had confirmed that cooperation between the Government and non-governmental organizations was essential.

19. Croatia's endeavours had come up against a number of obstacles owing to funding difficulties and the lack of quality statistical data, which were necessary for the systematic monitoring of trends and the objective evaluation of results.

20. The insufficient representation of women in the Croatian legislature had led to the convening of a meeting in Zagreb in 1998 to examine the issue. An increase in the number of women parliamentarians was on the agenda of a number of political parties.

21. **Ms. Bouman-Dentener** (Netherlands) said she cherished the dream that in the twenty-first century gender equality would be truly achieved. Currently there was still a long way to go, although many Governments had shown the political will to promote equal participation by women in public life. The number of female government ministers worldwide had more than doubled over the past 10 years. Nevertheless, the global average was still a mere 7 per cent and the difficulties encountered by the United Nations Secretariat itself in achieving a 50/50 gender balance by 2000 were common knowledge. In the Netherlands, 30 per cent of ministerial posts were held by women, but at the executive level, where gender mainstreaming policies were to be translated into practice, women were almost absent. True gender equality implied that women were no longer regarded as a separate group in society but that their views and requirements formed part and parcel of social and

economic development in general. In that regard the agreed conclusions on institutional mechanisms of the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-third session were important, since they requested Governments to ensure that senior management in each ministry or agency should integrate a gender perspective into all their activities and promote effective monitoring mechanisms.

22. Given that gender equality was an important aspect of sustainable development, the Netherlands women's movement concentrated its efforts on both objectives, in line with the principles contained in Agenda 21. At the Earth Summit in Rio and at the Women's Conference for a Healthy Planet, held in Miami in 1991, women had shown their willingness to take long-term responsibility for the well-being of the planet and to adopt an integrated approach to sustainable development wherein women participated on an equal footing with men and their respective needs were taken into consideration.

23. During the five-year review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, women would have the opportunity to hold their Governments to account. Even more important, however, was the process of mainstreaming a gender perspective into the reviews of other world conferences and programmes, such as the International Conference on Population and Development and the World Summit for Social Development. Poverty eradication, a main theme of the Summit's Programme of Action, was a prerequisite for sustainable development, and women comprised about 70 per cent of the world's poor.

24. At the second World Water Forum, to be held in The Hague in March 2000, the World Water Council would submit a comprehensive project, which was supported by all the United Nations agencies and the World Bank. Thanks to the efforts of her own Government and two other donors, Sweden and Luxembourg, a gender perspective had been injected into the project. At the national level, the Netherlands women's movement was being given ample support to ensure a gender-balanced approach.

25. Her delegation was closely following the revitalization process of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women. It was the intention of her Government — if other donors did likewise — to contribute to the core funding of the Institute's activities.

26. Lastly, her delegation expressed its satisfaction that the General Assembly had in plenary session adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

27. **Mr. Ibrahim** (Egypt) said that the States that had participated in the Fourth World Conference on Women had undertaken to expand their efforts to guarantee equality, development and peace for all the world's women in the context of the protection of their fundamental rights. There could therefore be no doubt that the adoption by consensus of the Optional Protocol to the Convention for the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women reflected the will of the international community to improve the status of women and protect their rights. In that connection, the Economic and Social Council had devoted a high-level debate to the question of demarginalization and the promotion of women by eliminating poverty, which would involve, on the one hand, strengthening the process of economic and social development at the national level and, on the other, the emergence of a more just and equitable international environment. In that regard, his delegation considered that the mobilization of resources and respect for all the commitments undertaken, including those by the developing countries, were prerequisites. The demarginalization of women would come about as a result of implementing legislation at the community level in relation to education, health, occupational training, employment and access to basic services, all areas which required material and technical resources from Governments and the international community in accordance with the policy commitments made by the advanced countries. In that regard, his delegation stressed that the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women should be provided with the financial and human resources needed for its activities.

28. The promotion and demarginalization of women were indispensable to development and social progress. The Egyptian Constitution guaranteed equality for all citizens and forbade any discrimination based on sex, religion, origin or language. Women enjoyed all civil and political rights and occupied the highest posts in all sectors. Aware of the direct relation between health and development, his Government, while guaranteeing the right to health for all women, whatever their age or place of residence, had introduced initiatives and long-term programmes to implement the recommendations of the Beijing Platform for Action. In the education sector, the Government was, as part of its policy to eliminate illiteracy, organizing free courses for women and men. Its efforts had been acknowledged by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which had commended, among others, the measures taken to close the educational gap between girls and boys in both town and country. His delegation attached particular importance to the preparation of the special session of the

General Assembly, which would provide the opportunity not to renegotiate the results of the Fourth World Conference on Women but to translate the international political will into reality through practical work programmes that could advance the implementation of the Conference outcomes.

29. **Mr. Cholil** (Indonesia) said that, although the right of women to equality and the principle of their full enjoyment of the fundamental rights were almost universally accepted, women continued to be denied the effective exercise of those rights, as was evident from wage discrimination, violence against women, and their limited access to education and appropriate health care. His delegation therefore looked forward to the special session of the General Assembly, which would provide an opportunity for a comprehensive review of the implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action, for adoption of decisions on further actions and initiatives, and for an assessment of the impact of the economic events of the past two years in the light of the recent financial crisis and the effects of structural adjustment, and of the benefits of globalization and market liberalization for women. Indonesia reaffirmed the importance which it attached to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women as an instrument for achieving *de jure* equality for women and de facto respect for their rights. It also looked forward to the implementation of the Optional Protocol adopted recently by the Commission on the Status of Women, which would facilitate the dialogue between States parties and the application of the Convention in a constructive and cooperative spirit.

30. The situation of women in Indonesia had improved considerably in recent years. However, the financial crisis had had a negative impact on employment, especially on vulnerable groups such as women. Yet Indonesia had continued to implement the Beijing Platform for Action, although adjusting its efforts to the current situation, and was committed to mainstreaming gender equality in all its policies and programmes. An increasing number of women were playing activist roles in politics and indeed a woman was a candidate for the Presidency. There was also a plan to establish a women's parliamentary caucus, which ought to have an impact on the work of the next Government. A bill on domestic violence had been drafted with the help of NGOs, which had also contributed to the preparation of a new and more gender-sensitive draft criminal code.

31. Indonesia welcomed the activities of bodies such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), UNIFEM and UNFPA, which had also contributed to the preparation of the draft plan of action on the elimination of violence against women. A National Commission had been established in 1998 to combat violence against women and it had helped to make national opinion more aware of the problem. In addition, women's studies centres had been set up in the country's universities with a view to helping the Government to determine policies and programmes to correct the gender imbalance. These centres had the support of an NGO Convention Watch, which was carefully evaluating in conjunction with the National Commission the report of the Special Rapporteur on violence against women drawn up following her visit to Indonesia, which had included East Timor.

32. **Mr. Sulaiman** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that women's rights must be promoted by means of education in order to enable them to play their proper role in society. In the Syrian Arab Republic women fully exercised their political, economic and cultural rights, as could be seen from the national report submitted to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. The report had been the subject of a debate which had led to the formulation of a national strategy to support activities and projects for women in the critical areas emphasized in the Beijing Platform for Action. The number of women holding responsible and decision-making posts in all fields continued to increase in the Syrian Arab Republic, and the Government was sparing no effort to provide women with the broadest possible representation.

33. The relevant institutions had continued the reform of legislation applicable to the fundamental rights of women. With regard to the fight against female poverty, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour, in cooperation with ILO and UNDP, was carrying out a number of training projects to enable women, including disabled women, to obtain paid jobs. The female active population had thus increased considerably. Women's needs with respect to social and health services were being satisfied, and the proportion of women working in the health sector had also risen substantially. The same was true of the media sector.

34. The Beijing Platform for Action recognized that foreign occupation prevented women from fully exercising their fundamental rights. The Arab women living under Israeli occupation in the Syrian Golan, southern Lebanon and the occupied Palestinian territories were undergoing great suffering, especially as a result of the dispersal of families and other hardships, including the impossibility of exercising their rights to freedom, education, health protection and dignity. The Syrian Government and the human rights organizations were following very closely the developments in the situation of women in those territories. The Syrian Arab Republic welcomed the cooperation with the specialized agencies of the United Nations and the

workshops which they were organizing for the advancement of rural women and their training for productive activities. The social and democratic environment had indeed made it easier to understand the issues of the advancement of women and gender equality, two principles embodied in the Constitution.

35. **Mr. Carranza** (Guatemala) said that it was not the purpose of the special session which the General Assembly was to hold in 2000 to negotiate new agreements or to revise existing ones, but rather to examine and evaluate the progress made in implementing the measures adopted in the 12 critical areas defined in the Beijing Platform for Action and of the new measures and initiatives to overcome the obstacles to the Platform's implementation. It was therefore a matter of effectively translating political will into concrete action so as to attain the Platform's goals. In that connection an early decision must be taken on the form of NGO participation in the special session, since that decision would involve the consideration of substantive questions requiring intensive work. His delegation was glad that the General Assembly had adopted the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

36. The political situation of women in Guatemala was characterized by discrimination, which not only harmed women but also obstructed the establishment of a true democracy in the country. The project on women and the legal reforms proposed by the National Women's Office were designed to demonstrate the importance of the participation of women in political life and the machinery by which they could come to hold elective posts. Since the signature of the Peace Agreements the National Women's Forum of the political parties and other women's organizations had made proposals for revision of the electoral law so as to encourage the participation of women in political life on an equal footing with men. Participation quotas had thus been established for women. However, despite the existence of a legal framework favourable to the advancement of women, discrimination persisted in the relations between the sexes. In order to put an end to that situation and guarantee justice and equity for all, the Government was planning to promulgate a law on sexual harassment and violence against women. It was also endeavouring to guarantee women equal access to economic resources and technology, education and comprehensive health services, as well as seeking to increase the female labour force by 30 per cent by 2000. On the basis of the multicultural nature of Guatemalan society the Government had formulated a national policy for the advancement and development of women together with a plan for equality of opportunities for 1999-2001, which were intended to consolidate democracy and contribute to sustainable human development, the full exercise of human rights, and the implementation of the Peace Agreements.

37. **Ms. Tamjidi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that her delegation fully supported the statement made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Despite the scientific and technological progress observable at the close of the century, many economic, social and political problems persisted, which the countries must resolve through constructive cooperation in the spirit of international solidarity. The special session of the General Assembly to be held in June 2000 would provide the international community with the opportunity to address the most serious problems and to give new momentum to international cooperation. In view of the effects of globalization and economic liberalization on the developing world, such cooperation was essential, because the efforts and resources of individual countries would not suffice to realize the goals set forth in the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, no matter how committed they might be to implementing the outcome of the Fourth World Conference on Women at the national level.

38. Action on behalf of women's rights should be directed not only to civil and political rights but also to economic, social and cultural rights, particularly the right to development, and must be supported by development policies at the national level and equitable economic exchanges and a favourable economic environment at the international level. Although globalization and liberalization should theoretically generate wealth, in reality the gap between rich and poor countries had grown, and poverty had affected women even more than men. The problem required comprehensive political, macroeconomic, social and legal solutions. The international community must work together to ensure that the global economic situation did not undermine the progress made in the advancement of women and that the social impact of structural-adjustment and contraction policies was not overlooked. In their efforts in that regard, the agencies of the United Nations system must be guided by an appreciation of the complementarity between development activities and initiatives for the advancement of women.

39. In preparation for the special session of the General Assembly, Iran's Centre for Women's Participation had undertaken initiatives to encourage Iranian women, through both governmental agencies and non-governmental organizations, to take part in capacity-building activities, in the elaboration of the national report on women and in

information and coordination workshops for governmental and non-governmental organizations.

40. **Mr. Jovanović** (Observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that in situations of armed conflict humanitarian law accorded women, as civilians, a general protection equal to that enjoyed by men and also provided special protection in keeping with their specific needs, as enshrined in the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 and the two Additional Protocols of 1977.

41. ICRC had repeatedly expressed its condemnation of the practice of rape in armed conflict and was therefore particularly satisfied to note that the international tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court considered sexual violence a war crime. That crime had been included in the study presented to the Preparatory Commission for the International Criminal Court regarding the definition of the elements of crimes.

42. International accountability was essential in order to bring an end to such violations and to combat impunity and should inspire similar measures at the national level. However, such violations of women's rights were due less to shortcomings in the laws designed to protect them than to insufficient respect for those laws. It was the responsibility of States to promote and disseminate the norms of humanitarian-law treaties to which they were parties and to prosecute suspected war criminals in their national courts or to extradite them.

43. Humanitarian law recognized the right of families to obtain information regarding the fate of their missing relatives. ICRC therefore urged all States and parties to armed conflict to cooperate in the tracing of missing persons. Since the preservation of the family unit was of crucial importance in times of conflict, ICRC in its day-to-day field activities and in accordance with its protection mandate, took action to maintain or restore contact between separated family members. In those situations, widowed women had often shown exceptional resilience and had in some cases redefined the traditional cultural and social perceptions of widowhood.

44. On the occasion of the twenty-seventh International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, to be held in Geneva in November 1999, a workshop would be held to identify the ways that programmes of assistance and protection could best take into account the long-term needs of widows for self-sufficiency. The results of the workshop would be included in the ICRC study on women affected by armed conflict, which would be used in developing operational and legal guidelines in consultation with United Nations agencies. ICRC was already working in cooperation with the United Nations in the sub-working group on gender and humanitarian assistance, created in November 1998, in its capacity as standing invitee of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee.

45. **Ms. Martínez** (Ecuador) said that her delegation fully supported the statements made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group. It welcomed the adoption by the General Assembly of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Government of Ecuador was now taking the necessary steps to sign the Protocol shortly and hoped that it could enter into force before or no later than the special session of the General Assembly scheduled for June 2000.

46. At the Conference in Beijing, the general problems of girls and women had been addressed. In keeping with the theme of the International Year of Older Persons, "A society for all ages", it was now time to consider more closely the specific needs of women of retirement age obliged to continue working to provide for their relatives, of women 15 to 24 years of age emerging from adolescence but not yet mature, and of handicapped girls and women of all ages. The special session of the General Assembly would offer an opportunity to address those issues and to adopt declarations that would renew the commitment of the Member States to redouble their efforts to build a society free of discrimination, in which each individual could develop his or her potential.

47. At the request of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the National Council for Women of Ecuador, in cooperation with organizations of civil society and Ecuadorean women's organizations, and pursuant to article 18 of the Convention had prepared its fourth and fifth combined reports which it would soon be submitting to the Division for the Advancement of Women.

48. Her delegation commended the Secretariat on the quality of the reports submitted to the Third Committee, and especially the report of the Secretary-General on the improvement of the situation of women in rural areas (A/54/123-E/1999/66), which contained valuable information on the situation of such women, particularly in the developing countries. Her delegation shared the Secretary-General's views that it was important to strengthen programmes and policies to meet the basic needs of women, and supported the recommendations in the report. The Ecuadorean Minister for Agriculture and Livestock had issued a ministerial decree on 3 June 1996 to set up a national division for rural women, youth and families which

would be responsible for raising public awareness of the work of women, to provide access to training and technical assistance and to facilitate their participation in political life at the local, regional and national levels.

49. She also commended the Secretary-General's report on the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and full implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action (A/54/264), which provided updated information on action by intergovernmental bodies, the United Nations system and non-governmental organizations. At the fourth meeting of governmental bodies and national agencies in Latin America and the Caribbean on women, held in San José, Costa Rica, in June 1999, the countries of the region had reviewed their strategies for assessment and follow-up of the Beijing Platform for Action and the commitments made.

50. **Mrs. Aponte De Zacklin** (Venezuela), speaking on agenda item 109, said that her delegation associated itself with the statements made by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and by Mexico on behalf of the Rio Group.

51. She paid tribute to the activities of the Office of the Special Adviser to the Secretary-General on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) — which were working towards mainstreaming a gender perspective into the activities of all United Nations agencies and which strongly supported the struggle of the Latin American women's movements against violence — and also of the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW), and welcomed the General Assembly's adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

52. In 1998, the Venezuelan Women's Council, together with other public bodies and non-governmental organizations, had drafted a five-year action plan that was in line with the objectives of the Beijing Conference and consisted of several components.

53. One component was concerned with access to power, and aimed to help women to exercise their citizenship and participate more in public affairs at all levels, through training workshops and reform of the law on the right to vote. Another part, relating to education, aimed to provide all women with the opportunity to achieve equality with men in education, by means of a project entitled "Education for equality", which aimed to teach in schools the methods for preventing gender discrimination and to enable pregnant adolescents to continue or return to their studies. Another component, on poverty, emphasized rural and indigenous women, who had been particularly neglected since the beginning of the 1980s, and provided for the adoption at local and regional levels of intersectoral and participatory measures in their favour, and, more generally, the integration of a gender perspective in all areas and at all stages of national production. Yet another component was concerned with violence in the home and sexual violence, both as public-health problems and social problems, and had led to the adoption of measures to prevent, curb and eliminate them, such as the law on violence to women and the family of 3 September 1998, which protected women and other family members from abuse. Training courses were being organized for officials who had to deal with problems of violence and agreements to allow assistance to the victims of abuse had been signed with the local authorities.

54. **Ms. Arias** (Peru) recalled that the Fourth World Conference on women had recognized the need to link women's empowerment and gender equality to the elimination of poverty, and that unequal or insufficient access for women to education and health care, violence against women and their marginalization in decision-making would hinder the development of society as a whole.

55. In Peru, the recommendations of the Beijing Conference had given rise to the creation in October 1996 of the Ministry for the Promotion for Women and Human Development, which aimed to bring about a widespread cultural change which would enable women and men to enjoy the same opportunities in an atmosphere of peace, democracy and solidarity. Since then, an important political and legal process aiming to provide Peruvian women with the necessary tools to participate in a more equitable manner in the country's development had been launched. In addition, various legal provisions to curb violence in the home, to give women access to employment and education, and to establish a quota of 25 per cent for women on the lists of candidates for the National Congress had been instituted. One result had been the repeal of article 178 of the Peruvian Penal Code, under which a rapist or accomplice to a rape could atone for his crime by marrying the victim, and another had been the opportunity for women to enter the schools for officers and non-commissioned officers in the armed forces. Institutional mechanisms had also been established (Defence Committee for Women, Children and Adolescents; Commission for Women, Human Development and Sport; etc.) for the purpose of proposing measures to achieve the objectives of gender equality and non-discrimination against women and to follow up their implementation. Finally, 40 per cent of the national budget would henceforth be devoted to social expenditure and particularly to the national policy for gender equality, which was indicative of the progress made in Peru

in recent years. Although the action taken to advance women in Peru was still insufficient, it reflected a firm resolve to improve their position.

56. The holding of the special session of the General Assembly in June 2000 had triggered a process in Peru that could not be halted and that the Government intended to continue in order to overcome any obstacles to attaining the objectives of the Beijing Conference.

57. Merely implementing the recommendations of important conferences, and specifically the Beijing Conference, would not suffice; further efforts should be made to strengthen what had been gained. The progress made in the implementation of national policies to advance women over the past five years should encourage the international community to give priority to that task.

58. In conclusion, her delegation emphasized the importance of the General Assembly's adoption of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and eagerly looked forward to its entry into force.

The meeting rose at noon.